

FAST FACTS

Providing Signing Bonuses

A current trend, encouraged in various programs within the NCLB Act, is to provide signing bonuses to teachers to attract highly qualified personnel. This practice is allowable under certain circumstances. North Dakota school districts that have expressed interest in this option are usually attempting to meet provisions required by Title I schoolwide planning regulations or the Title I program improvement provisions, specifically those for alternative governance. In addition, providing signing bonuses as a strategy to recruit, hire, or retain highly qualified teachers and principals is allowable under Title II, Part A.

- For schoolwide schools, which are working to implement intensive school improvement plans focused on raising academic achievement for ALL students, teacher turnover can make or break a successful schoolwide plan. Schoolwide schools must focus on improving all teachers' knowledge of how to teach all students in the regular classroom, and if teachers are constantly coming and going at the school, training to improve teacher knowledge in this area will never reach a level that can impact student learning. Therefore, retaining effective staff and attracting high quality applicants is of paramount importance to a schoolwide school. One method that some schools have requested to attract and retain high quality teachers for their high needs schoolwide program is to offer a signing bonus.
- Schools/districts that fail to make AYP for six consecutive years enter the seventh category of program improvement. In this category, it is required that the school/district implement one of five alternative governance options as outlined and approved in North Dakota's State Plan to the U.S. Department of Education. If staff turnover is an issue, one of the five options allows schools/districts to offer signing bonuses to attract highly qualified personnel to their school/district.
- An allowable expenditure under Title II, Part A is developing and implementing strategies and activities to recruit, hire, or retain highly qualified teachers and principals. These strategies may include (a) providing monetary incentives such as scholarships, signing bonuses, or differential pay for teachers in academic subjects or schools in which the LEA has shortages.

The North Dakota Century Code Section 15.1-09-33.1 provides further clarity on when and where signing bonuses can be given in North Dakota. Specifically, the law indicates that employees employed as a classroom teacher by the board of a school district in North Dakota during the previous year cannot be eligible to receive the bonus. Schools/districts choosing to use funds for signing bonuses as a way to meet program improvement alternative governance or schoolwide programming requirements will be required to demonstrate meeting the requirements of the law. The provisions apply regardless of the funding source (e.g., local, state, federal, BIE).

Schools/districts selecting the option to provide a signing bonus must have a written, clear, uniformly applied definition and process outlined to be reviewed by the Office of Federal Title Programs.

If you have questions regarding this issue, please contact the Division of Student Support & Innovation at (888) 605-1951.